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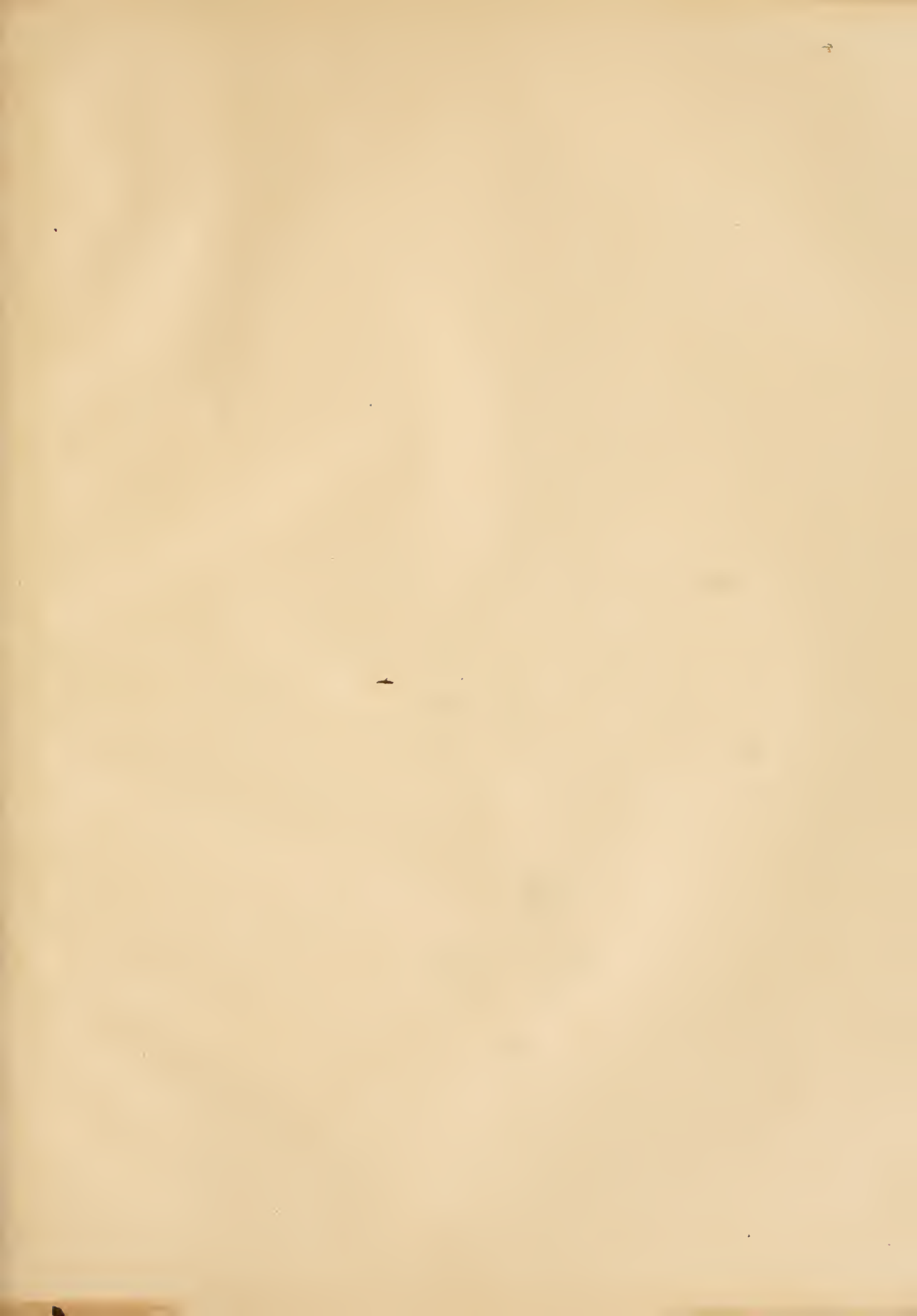


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James Abram Garfield.

by Samuel W. Thompson.

[Historical Society of Pennsylvania]



Presented by Samuel W. Thompson, 1871

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DAVIS & PENNYPACKER,
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At the meeting of the Council of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, held September 26th, 1881, the following memorial note was read by Mr. Samuel W. Pennypacker, and was ordered to be entered on the minutes.

JAMES ABRAM GARFIELD, twentieth President of the United States, was born in Orange Township, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, November 19th, 1831, and died at Elberon, New Jersey, September 19th, 1881, from the effects of a wound by a pistol ball, fired by a worthless wretch in the city of Washington, July 2d, 1881.

Edward Garfield, the founder of the family in America, of sturdy Saxon stock, came from Chester, England, and settled in Watertown, Massachusetts, as early as 1630. He lived to be ninety-seven years old. The men of his race seem to have taken to themselves wives of equal physical vigor. The Philadelphia Weekly Mercury, of February 3d, 1729-30, notices the death of Mrs. Garfield of Watertown, at the age of ninety years. Thus remotely may be traced that exuberant vitality which enabled the future President to smile hopefully and live for nearly three months with a shattered vertebra.

In the local affairs of the New England burghs in which they lived, and through the colonial and Revolutionary wars, the Garfields bore an active if not a prominent part.

Solomon, the great-grandfather of the President, removed to Otsego County, New York, and his grandson, Abram, obey-

ing that fateful call, which has ever been coming from the forests and prairies of the West to young men of robust natures possessing the instinct of thrift, went, when eighteen years old, to Ohio. There he married Eliza Ballou, of Huguenot ancestry, and died when James, his boy of promise, was under two years of age. When the head of a household is taken away ere his work is done, and the wife is left alone to provide for a family of young children, the struggle is necessarily one of hardship and is attended with much of privation and trial. These were the circumstances that surrounded the childhood and youth of Mr. Garfield; but many of the events of this early period, which were mere episodes in his career, have been given undue prominence. The American public is prone to believe that the men, who have moulded its destinies, have come up from the depths. It learns with peculiar delight that its popular heroes, its orators and statesmen, have been "The Mill Boy of the Slashes," the inhabitant of a "Log Cabin," the "Rail Splitter," and the "Canal Boy of the Towpath." To meet the exigencies of political campaigns, the good antecedents of Lincoln and Garfield have been passed over lightly or forgotten, while the sombre hues have been painted darker and the pits dugged deeper. The lofty aspirations, the correct tastes, and the large capacity of Mr. Garfield, soon enabled him to overcome the obstacles that confronted him. He saved enough from his earnings to get the benefit of a course of schooling at the rural academy of his neighborhood. By teaching school, and by working as a carpenter and a harvest hand, he earned enough more to maintain himself for two years at Williams College. It is worthy of remark that he was fitted to enter the junior class, that he was one of the editors of the college paper, and that, at graduation, he took the class honor in metaphysics.

Up to this time, when he was twenty-five years of age, he had never cast a vote, but the principles of the Republican party, then just coming into existence, met with his approval and appealed to his sympathies; and in 1856 he made his first political speech. He had several years earlier delivered a number of sermons, as a lay preacher, in the Church of the Disciples, with which he was connected. On his return from college, he was chosen professor of ancient languages in the Hiram Eclectic Institute, and later principal of that academy. During the next three or four years, he lectured to his classes, delivered public addresses upon scientific and literary subjects, spoke on the stump through the political campaigns, and on Sundays preached.

In 1859, he was elected to the State Senate. While there he read law, and was admitted to the bar in 1861. The war, however, turned him aside from a professional career.

He was appointed to the colonelcy of an Ohio regiment, and before 1863, through gallantry and skill at Sandy Valley, Pittsburg Landing and Chickamauga, he had reached the position of chief of staff to General Rosecrans and the rank of major general. He was also a member of that celebrated court martial which tried and convicted Fitz John Porter.

While in the military service, he was elected to Congress. He took his seat in 1863, and for the next eighteen years was continued in this position, representing a larger majority of voters than any other member of the House. These eighteen years constitute a period in which was enacted the most important legislation in the history of the country. The military measures of the war, the reconstruction of the seceded states, the raising and collection of immense revenues, the financial policy to be pursued, the resumption of specie payments and the disputed succession to the presidency, were among the problems successfully

solved. Certainly, statesmen, no where, were ever called upon to grapple with questions of greater moment. It is enough to indicate the strength of Mr. Garfield that he was one of the military committee during the war, chairman of the committee on appropriations, afterwards a member of the electoral commission in 1876, and became the recognized leader of his party in the House. The Ohio Legislature, in 1880, elected him to the United States Senate, for the term beginning November 4th, 1881.

No party convention ever had it in its power to affect more seriously the institutions of the country than that which assembled in Chicago, in 1880, to nominate a candidate for the presidency. A few months earlier, the selection of ex-President Grant had seemed inevitable. For two years, a banker in Philadelphia, with a taste for higher politics, had been urging the nomination of Mr. Garfield in the columns of the Penn Monthly and making combinations looking to that result. On the first ballot, Mr. Garfield had but one vote, that of a friend of the Philadelphia banker. On the thirty-sixth ballot he was nominated. After a close struggle he was elected, and so it happened that he was a member of the House, a member elect of the Senate, and President elect of the United States at the same time; a distinction which never fell to man before. The policy of his administration had barely been defined, its strength had just been successfully tested, when an assassin crept up behind him and gave him a fatal wound.

Though his rule was brief, there are two things which will make it historic. His elevation marked the dissipation of that power dangerous to the republic, which was concentrated during the war, and in sympathy with him the men of the North and the men of the South were for the first time thoroughly reunited.

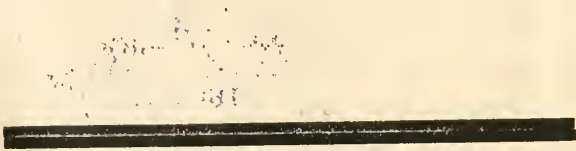
Mr. Garfield was a man of great physical power. He was tall, with broad shoulders, a deep chest and a large head, while a continuous flow of animal spirits indicated his perfect health. Intellectually, his most striking characteristic was his immense breadth. It is given to but a very small number of men to succeed in any pursuit. Many are called, but few are chosen. The sea of life lines its shores with the shells of failures and things dead. Mr. Garfield was a scholar learned in the languages of the past, a preacher of the Gospel, a soldier in command on the battle field, a student of literature, finance and politics, an orator and a statesman; and in all of these diverse paths he reached distinction. He wrote a graceful poem, discussed geological problems with the professors, examined into the local history of his neighborhood, and with the same ease he met the masters of debate in Congress upon abstract questions of state. Nature, which has provided the most powerful of animals with an organ of such strength that it can uproot trees, and of such delicacy that it can untie knots, seems to have endowed him with mental capacities of like flexibility.

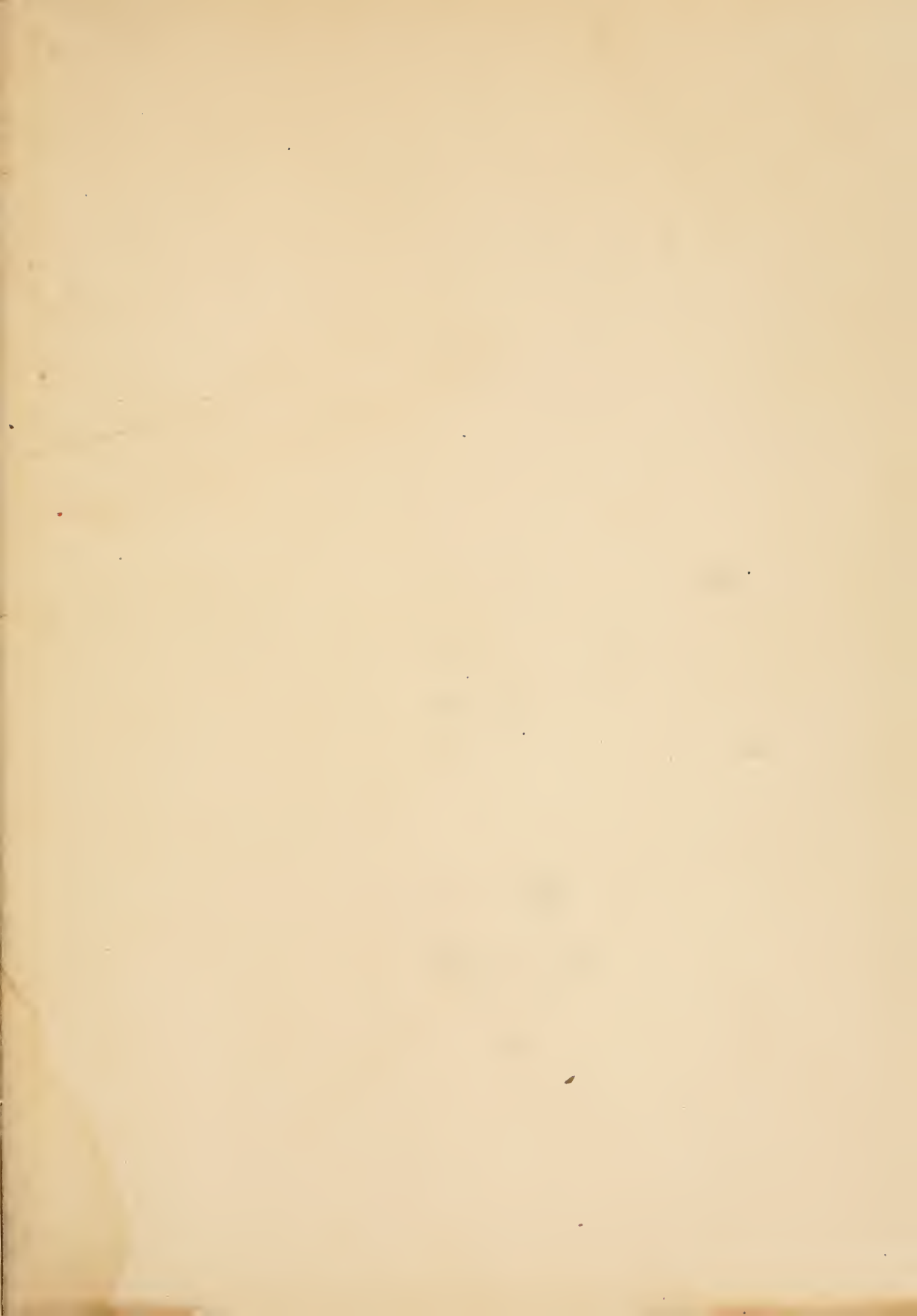
He was brave and generous. When the stoutest of the partisan leaders threw the glove in his face, he picked it up quietly, and his antagonist disappeared from the arena. He met his fate like a man. In his long struggle with death, there was much that was sublime. He uttered no repinings; he expressed no resentment toward the thing that had struck him; there came from his bed of suffering no cry, save that sad longing to see once more the green fields of his home. When he was elected to the presidency, it seemed that the better days for the republic were come; for surely much was to be expected from his enlarged mind, his great soul, and his long training in statecraft. He laid his strong hand upon the wheel, and he is

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gone. It is his own thought that men affect but for a little while our institutions. Like the raindrops, they may pass through the shining bow and add to its lustre; but when they have sunk the proud arch still in glory spans the sky. May it prove to be true. "Put him up higher!" cried a voice, when he arose to speak in the Chicago convention. The voice proved to be that of a prophet. It is a consolation to the American people now that he is being mourned as ruler never was before, to know that in that higher sphere to which he has been raised, he is at last at rest from the bitter pain and the hopeless struggle.

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, upon the day of his funeral, when every city in the land is draped in black, and all trade is suspended, notes this brief outline of his career and meagre sketch of his character.





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